

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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AT THE MOMENT OF VICTORY.

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CHAPTER XVI.

ONE way or another, affairs seemed very much at sixes and sevens at the Castle just then.

For one thing, Sir Peter's illness upset all their autumn plans—a trip to Biarritz for Lady Judith and Madge, Lance's grouse shooting on the Scotch moors prior to a fortnight's fishing in Norway. For another, the spirit of Queen Mab herself seemed abroad in the house, and every one appeared to be doing just exactly the particular thing that was to be least expected of them.

Madge, embroidery in hand, sat in her rocking-chair under the "dark-green layers of shade" of the old cedar on the lawn, watching a whole pageant of fantastic white clouds fleeting across a deep-blue sky before a strong current.

"That's us to the life just now," she said to herself emphatically, though ungrammatically. "There's a mermaid—look at her fish-tail!—riding on a tiger! There's a big white cat with a Gainsborough hat on his head. Here I come! There's a huge four-wheeled triumphal-car with nothing but a stupid little swan to draw it. No, that isn't me either. A swan is a very beautiful creature, also I'm not trying to drag anything along at the present moment; no, I only wish I could make one thing stand still—for ever. Here's a great snow mountain just toppling over, and there's a poor little bat stretching out its wings to protect something. What is it? A teacup? a pigeon's egg on

end? That's me to the life—the bat, that is; ugly enough and trying to do impossibilities with its stupid little wings!"

Madge's train of thought had been set going by two little incidents of that day's occurrence, in which the chief actors had conducted themselves as uncharacteristically as could well be imagined.

Incident number one had been a little speech of Lance's, made à propos of nothing at all, so far as she could see.

"Madge," he had said, with a sudden energy which set her thoughts ranging upon wild possibilities, "what an unlucky beggar I am never to have had a profession given to me! Now, supposing I were ever to offend Uncle Peter in any way, and he were to cut me off with a shilling, how on earth could I get my bread and butter? I should have to turn either groom or gamekeeper! 'Pon my life I don't think I'm fit for anything else."

Incident number two had occurred during the reading of Sir Peter's correspondence, to which Madge devoted punctiliously two hours every morning. It cost her a huge effort to do this, and she never broke a seal now without a chill, quaking as to the news that seal might secure. Mr. Stubbs, as a rule, sat a model of respectful attention during the reading of those letters. He never uttered a syllable unless addressed, when his words in reply would be discreet and few. On this particular morning, however, Madge had no sooner taken her place in Sir Peter's chair than he began to talk, and the subject of his talk was himself and his family.

"I have had a letter this morning, Mrs. Cohen," he began, "which has greatly distressed me."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Madge, round-

eyed with a sudden terror lest the subject of the Australian letter might be circulating from other quarters.

"I don't think I ever mentioned the fact to you that I have a son — Roger by name."

Madge drew a long breath of relief; her slight bow, however, in acknowledgment of the communication, expressed but the faintest interest in Roger.

Mr. Stubbs, however, felt sufficiently encouraged to proceed.

"This son, I grieve to say, has been one continual source of anxiety to me. He has had loss upon loss in his profession—that of a ship and insurance broker—and is now threatened with bankruptcy by his creditors unless I can get together a certain amount to meet his present difficulties."

Madge was not disposed to invite further confidences.

"Will a cheque for twenty pounds be of any use to you?" she asked, by way of cutting the matter short.

"It would be of use, and I should be grateful for it, Mrs. Cohen," he replied, drooping his eyelids till the eyes beneath showed not as orbs but as slits. "But I hope you won't mind my saying that a cheque for fifty pounds would be of much greater use, as the sum we have to get together is rather a large one."

If the armed warrior in bronze, who surmounted the clock on the mantelpiece, had suddenly descended from his pedestal and asked her to valse with him, Madge could not have felt more surprised than she did at this unexpected request. It was not made in Mr. Stubbs's usually obsequious fashion, but rather stated bluntly, as a matter of fact that must be patent to all.

She was always inclined to be free-handed with the Cohen gold, but she did not choose to have it demanded of her.

"I will think over your request," she said coldly, as she went back to her letter-reading.

And she did think over his request, as also over Lance's startling tirade on his incapacity for earning his bread and butter; but the only results to her thinking were the fantastic forms she evolved from the clouds—a sort of picture-poem of life at the Castle at the moment.

From where she sat beneath the cedar she could catch a glimpse between the shining laurel leaves of an opaque patch of grey skirt, which at that distance represented Miss Shore at her easel.

That grey skirt was, as it were, a stum-

bling-block to the wheels of her thoughts every time it caught her eye—just, too, when she wanted those thoughts to be working at their hardest and smoothest. So she turned her chair slantwise, shutting it out from her view.

It was too hot to finger her embroidery; her silks, a tangle of soft colours, slipped to her feet on the grass. A faint south wind blowing over the orchard, brought with it the scent of ripening fruits. Overhead, the great, golden, brooding clouds hung low.

Madge, with half-shut eyes, rocked herself backwards and forwards; now the tangled colours of the silks caught her eye, anon the golden, brooding clouds. Now the coloured silks were up in the sky, a many-tinted rainbow; now the full-breasted clouds were at her feet, blotting out the green earth, and transforming the whole garden-picture into a cloud-fresco in carnations and azure, that Murillo might have painted as a background to his ascending Virgin.

Those clouds and the rocking-chair together sent her into dreamland. Her eyes, full of the sky, drooped.

She opened them, as she thought, in a beautiful garden; a garden scarcely to be realised out of fairy-fable, for the light poured down from the sky on it like some great falling rainbow, transfiguring trees, flowers, and green sward, into all sorts of marvellous hues. Lance stood beside her.

"Is this Eden?" in her dream she thought she said to him. But even as she asked the question a dense, grey cloud settled down upon the fairy garden like a great fog, and all the beautiful colours died under it. It came, a misty bulk, between her and Lance, and she saw him no more. Only his voice, far away from out the cloud, came saying, "Madge, Madge, help me!"

Madge awoke with a great start. Yes, there was a voice at her elbow, not Lance's, however, but Mr. Stubbs's; and, instead of begging for her help, he was as usual making apologies for disturbing her.

"But old Donald, the grave-digger," he went on to say, "was here just now gossiping with the gardeners, and he gave me this, thinking it might belong to some one in the house, for there's no such outlandish name as the one marked on it known in the village."

As he finished speaking he held out to her view a lady's pocket-handkerchief. It was trimmed with lace, and had the name "Etelka," embroidered in one corner.

Madge scrutinised the lace. It was unlike anything she had ever seen before—something of an old Greek pattern worked in Mechlin thread.

Mr. Stubbs's face said, "An I would I could!"

His lips said:

"I told Donald that to the best of my knowledge no one at the Castle possessed such a name."

"Where did Donald find it?" queried Madge.

"He said under the yews in the churchyard."

"Leave it with me, I'll try to find its owner," said Madge, always inclined to abridge intercourse with Mr. Stubbs as much as possible.

He bowed and withdrew.

Madge sat staring at the handkerchief with the outlandish name in the corner.

"There's only one person here likely to own to that name," she thought. "And it suits her infinitely better than the plain English name she sees fit to mask under."

She looked towards the corner of the garden where Miss Shore had been seated at the easel. Now should she take the handkerchief to her at once, ask if it were hers, and what could be the object of her solitary rambles in the churchyard?

Miss Shore, however, together with her easel, had disappeared. Second thoughts assured Madge of the uselessness of such a course. A cold expressionless "No," without change of feature, would no doubt be the only result to the plainly-put question, "Is this yours?"

Better keep it awhile; find out a little more about it; ask Donald himself as to the exact "where" and "when" he had found it. She was not disposed to trust Mr. Stubbs implicitly in either small or great matters, and had no wish to show him that the handkerchief had any special interest for her.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Cohen," said Mr. Stubbs's voice, at this very moment, "but may I ask if you have had time to think over my request of this morning?"

Madge's reply was a cold and repressive "I have not."

Mr. Stubbs again bowed, and withdrew.

He made half-a-dozen steps down the gravel path and came back again.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Cohen," he said respectfully as before, "but perhaps you have forgotten that the Australian mail goes out to-morrow. If the letter

addressed to Sir Peter is of any importance, it might be as well to acknowledge it."

Madge had it in her heart to ask a string of questions, such as: "What is this letter to you? What do you know of its contents? How dare you keep thrusting yourself and your affairs upon my notice!"

She controlled herself with difficulty, saying merely:

"The letter requires no acknowledgment whatever."

CHAPTER XVII.

MADGE had a lonely dinner that night. A message was brought to her that Lady Judith had gone to bed with a bad headache, and that Lance, who had gone out driving in the afternoon, had sent back his dog-cart with the intimation that he should most likely dine with Lady Brabazon—their nearest neighbour—and walk home afterwards.

Madge as much as possible curtailed her solitary meal. It was not a particularly cheerful one, eaten in that big dining-hall, with the "eight-and-twenty Critchetts looking down" on her.

After dinner she wandered out to her favourite twilight haunt—the terrace, with its grand double landscape of sky and mountain, valley and plain.

The after-glow lingered yet in sheen of mother-o'-pearl athwart a limpid stretch of tender green sky. A veil of night-blue mist was slowly spreading itself over the valley, adding a mystery and poetry to it which in garish sunlight it never knew. Madge, without much stretch of imagination, could have fancied it some land of enchantment sinking slowly—slowly into the earth whence it had been evoked by magician's wand.

Her thoughts, however, in their restless turmoil soon brought her from the poem of shining sky and shadowy valley back to commonplace, hard-featured prose. Lance was the key-note, the beginning, end, and middle of those tumultuous thoughts. The echo of the cry, "Madge, help me!" which she had heard in her dream, seemed to ring in her ears yet. Help him! Why, her heart was all one prayer to be allowed to do so. Years ago she had stood on one side—had thrust herself out of his path as it were—by marrying David Cohen, in order not to mar his future; now should she stand tamely by and see him blight that future with his own hands?

Here it was that Madge no longer

beheld the fading glories of the after-glow, nor the mysterious valley under its night-blue veil seeming to sink slowly into the heart of the earth again. Her eyes instead, for their own torment, conjured up a picture-gallery in which Lance's face and form in endless repetition did duty for a hundred. Now he was standing gazing with surprised admiration at a girl lifting a grey gossamer veil; anon he was seated facing that girl with an intense, eager interest shining out of his eyes. After these came all sorts of scenes in which his face, together with its admiration and interest, had a kindly sympathy and pity written upon it.

At this point Madge's ears became filled with other voices than those of the thrushes among the sycamores, chanting their requiem to the dying day. Lance's voice, in pitiful pleading for the forlorn stranger, rang in them instead.

And coming always as a refrain to these thoughts, persistent as the echo to the hammer on the anvil, was the bitter self-accusation that once, not so very long ago, Lance's fate had been in her hands, and she had had the privilege of making or marring it with a single word.

Here Madge's own society became too much for her. A short sharp walk she felt, before daylight closed in, would be the quickest way of putting an end to that hateful iteration in her ears of "Half your own doing, Madge Cohen, half your own doing."

The handkerchief with the foreign name on it afforded her a pretext for a ramble. Old Donald, the grave-digger, as a rule spent his summer evenings in St. Cuthbert's churchyard, trimming graves or sweeping paths. She would like to put to him direct a question or two as to the finding of this handkerchief. Old Donald had keen eyes and ears; perhaps in addition to answering her questions, he might be able to give her some little information as to when and for what purpose Miss Shore haunted the old burying-place.

It was a walk of about half-an-hour that Madge proposed to herself. She made that half-hour twice its length with the fancies she crowded into it. Like the old Indian, who painted a vivid picture of the little man who stole his venison, together with the bob-tail dog, merely from seeing a foot-print in a dusty road, Madge constructed a whole life history for Miss Shore out of the name embroidered on the pocket-handkerchief, which had not yet been identified as hers.

St. Cuthbert's church was built on a rocky headland about a mile and a half distant from the Castle. It commanded on its western side a magnificent view of the rolling Irish sea, whose rough breezes had battered its grey walls for close upon two hundred winters. On its eastern side it was reached by a steep winding road direct from the valley. The larches, which drooped stately branches here and there over the stony path, had gone to a dusky olive as Madge wound her way upwards. At the end of the road the low, grey stone wall of the church showed bleak and bare from out the deeper grey of shadowy waving grass; above it, the stone tower rose a dark square against the yellow zone which belted the horizon.

The place of tombs looked weird and desolate as Madge entered it. The seawind blew over it, ruffling the long grasses on one or two forgotten graves, and setting a group of aspens that over-shadowed the lych-gate whispering and shivering. There was not a sign of old Donald anywhere. Madge wandered in vain down the by-walk which skirted the low grey wall. An owl flew from out the tower with a harsh cry, an old yew—black against a white tombstone—creaked in the sea-breeze. Other sound there was none.

Madge felt that she had had her walk for nothing. Twilight was falling rapidly now; the gold had died out of the yellow zone which belted the horizon; a white ocean-mist—itsself a great silver sea—came surging up behind the church-tower. Overhead here and there in the limpid grey of the sky, a star, like a tiny diamond spark, would catch the eye, twinkle—vanish—shine out again.

Madge turned her face towards the lych-gate, thinking the sooner she got back to the house now the better. She had walked a little of the bitterness out of her thoughts, but somehow—she could not say exactly how—the sadness in them seemed to have deepened. She felt tired—chilled by the mist and the weird loneliness of the place.

"Good times, bad times, all times pass over," she could fancy those voiceless dead were preaching to her from under their grassy mounds.

How still the graveyard seemed to have grown! She could hear the twilt twilt of the bats as they flitted in ghostly fashion round the belfry window. Even the light fall of her step on the gravel seemed to waken echoes from the other end of the long dim walk.

But were those the echoes of her own tread? Madge asked herself, pausing under the shadow of a tall monument, white against the grey of the sky.

The sound of voices which came nearer with the supposed echoes, answered her question in the negative.

Madge, prompted by impulse, rather than by any definite purpose, shrank behind the tall white stone as two long, dark shadows, falling athwart her path, heralded the approach of a man and woman. Their voices came to her clear and distinct through the stillness of the evening air. Madge's ears needed not to be told who were the owners of those voices.

"Lance and that girl in grey!" she said to herself. And after that the dead might have crawled from under their grassy mounds, and in their grave garments have preached their sermon to her, but she would not have heard one word of it.

Lance was evidently in as light-hearted a mood as usual. "We're early," he was saying as he came along. "'There's husbandry in heaven, their candles are'—not yet lighted. Last night we had better luck."

"Last night, last night!" repeated Madge, a great wave of jealous anger sweeping over her. "That was why then he did not come into the drawing-room last night! why he gave short, absent answers to my questions, and looked and walked like one in a dream."

For a moment the dim churchyard and ghostly white tombs grew misty to her. Her ears even refused to perform their work, and Miss Shore's answer was a blank to her.

Not so Lance's next sentence. His voice in nearer approach rang like a clarion in her ear. It was:

"I haven't forgotten a word of what you taught me last night. I know which are the benefic planets and which the malefic ones, and I know that all the malefic planets are setting and all the benefic ones are rising. And that means that those who have hitherto been unlucky will forthwith begin to have a real good time of it, and those who have been in luck before will be luckier than ever."

Miss Shore's voice in reply, by contrast with his light tones, sounded grave to absolute solemnity.

"Why do you laugh in the face of fate as you do? Evil stars are rising, not setting. You may be born to good luck—

I do not know—but others are born to ill-luck—to be evil, to do evil. It is no laughing matter."

There was one behind that tall tombstone, at any rate, who found it no laughing matter.

Lance's tones suddenly changed to an earnestness that sat strangely upon him.

"You are right," he replied, "there is a time to laugh, and a time to weep; and I'm confident if I knew one quarter of the ill-luck you've had to go through, I should feel far more inclined to weep than to laugh over it. But you won't give me the chance! You keep your lips sealed; you reject help; reject sympathy even."

He was standing still in the middle of the path now, facing his companion. Madge could have stretched out her hand and touched him as he stood.

The words themselves expressed naught beyond the kindest sympathy. Madge herself—any Sister of Charity—might have spoken them to any poor, forlorn outcast who came in their way. But they would not have sounded as they did on Lance's lips. He put another soul into them with his eager, heated, impassioned manner. That, not Madge, nor any woman living, could have so much as mimicked.

Miss Shore's pale face flushed into sudden animation under it. Her words came hurriedly, nervously, not with their usual cold, slow emphasis.

"You do not understand," she answered. "My luck is not a thing past and done with. My evil star has risen. In three weeks from to-night it will be at its highest—above the moon, above the star that might bring me good luck. If that day passes over my head in peace I will talk no more of fate, no more of ill-luck. I will look up at the stars and will laugh in their faces."

GEMS OF THE EASTERN SEAS.

To the north-east of the large island of Borneo, there is a chain of little islands running across and forming a link with the important group of the Philippines. This chain separates the Sulu Sea from the Celebes Sea, and is known as the Sulu Archipelago. At least it is so named on the maps; but to say that it is "known," is to use a larger expression than the case warrants. As a matter of fact, these islands are not known at all to the general body of English people, and it is because

of the ignorance, and because of the peculiar claims to interest which they really possess, that we are moved to prepare the present article. It has been suggested by the wonderfully interesting narrative of "The Cruise of the 'Marchesa,'" in which Dr. F. H. H. Guillemard tells many strange things of many unknown, or little known, lands which he visited, but none more attractive than this neglected group of islands, in the Eastern Seas.

Some two hundred miles or so to the north-westward of the Sulu Archipelago, in an isolated position in the Sulu Sea, is the island of Cagayan Sulu, which, although nominally under the authority of the Sultan of Sulu, is practically independent. Admiral Keppel explored it along with Rajah Brooke of Sarawak; but since then it is probable that no European visited its shores until Dr. Guillemard landed there in 1883. And yet it is the most captivating in appearance of all the beautiful islands of these beautiful seas. One traveller has called it a "true gem of the ocean," and Dr. Guillemard says that, "as the boat glided over the coral-gardens, bright with vividly-coloured fish, and landed me, gun and collecting-box in hand, on the snowy sand, I felt as if I could cast off civilisation and European clothes alike, and cultivate my mealie patch and grove of cocoa-nuts with the natives for the remainder of my natural life."

The island of Cagayan Sulu is about five miles in length by four in width, is purely volcanic and highly fertile. The land is low and undulating, rising nowhere to a greater elevation than eleven hundred feet, and yet the remains of several extinct volcanoes are still to be seen, marked with lumps of slag and scorise.

The natives live in the little valleys and along the sea-shore, where their mat-shed houses, built on piles in Papuan fashion, are placed amid delightful groves of banana, cocoa-nut, and other fruit-bearing trees. They do not cultivate much—why should they, when nature is so lavish in her bounties?—and they are content with growing yam, and sweet potatoe, and tapioca. Mostly they live on fish, with which the smooth waters within the reef which encircles the island abound.

But the great physical distinction and remarkable feature of beauty in Cagayan Sulu is the unique chain of crater-lakes which it possesses. Admiral Keppel discovered, and has described, one of these;

but Dr. Guillemard found others, forming a chain of three. The first is entered by a narrow passage through the barrier reef, and is, therefore, a sea-lake. In point of fact, it is the crater of an extinct volcano, into which the sea has made its way.

"The little lake and its surroundings," says Dr. Guillemard, "were fairy-like in their beauty, but so peculiar in character and so rich in the tropical luxuriance of foliage as to give an almost theatrical effect. Around us the dense jungle overhung the water, completely precluding any attempt to land, and clothed the steep walls of the crater to a height of two hundred feet or more. Giant creepers had sprung from tree to tree, and, choking the struggling vegetable life beneath them with an impenetrable mass of foliage, hung in long trailers towards the margin of the water below—a wealth of green of every imaginable shade."

Divided from this first lake by a knife-like ledge of rock on the eastern side, is the second lake, almost perfectly circular and rather smaller than the first. Although its southern margin is within a few yards of the beach, the sea has not yet found an inlet; indeed, the water seems to be in this case some forty feet above the sea level, the almost perpendicular crater-walls being covered with masses of creepers. Adjoining the second, Dr. Guillemard found a third lake—somewhat smaller than the other two—being two-fifths instead of three-fifths of a mile across, but with a perfectly circular basin, and with fresh water at about the level of the second lake. In this case the sides do not run sheer down to the water, but leave room for a small beach, while dense jungle clothes the precipitous sides.

This gem of the ocean—Cagayan Sulu—we learn, was colonised originally from the Sulu Archipelago, and the language spoken is Sulu; but yet many of the people also speak Malay. Down to about 1863 they suffered much from the Sulu pirates; but now these pests are tolerably well, although not altogether, cleared off the face of the seas. The natives, as has been said, trouble themselves little with cultivation, and their sole export trade is in cocoa-nut oil. The island is healthy, and said to be well adapted to coffee, cacao, and sugar, only no attempt seems to have been made to cultivate either. The population is estimated at something under three thousand,

and the women do what agricultural work there is, while the men attend to the fishing, which they practise both from dug-out canoes and from rafts made of large bamboos lashed together.

From Cagayan Sulu to Sulu proper, the chief island of the Sulu Archipelago, is a short run by steam, but a long one by sail, because of the powerful currents and the many shoals caused by the numerous islets. And Sulu proper is described as a second and almost more beautiful edition of Cagayan Sulu. "A dark mass of jungle-covered mountain, half-hidden in mist and rain-cloud, dimly overlapped the lower slopes, where the bright-green lalang grass was dotted here and there with trees or varied by patches of a deep brownish-red, which marked the plots of cultivated ground. Further to the south, the cone-shaped peak of Mount Tulipan proclaimed itself a volcano, and as the 'Marchesa' rounded the western point and made for the harbour of Meimbun on the south side, the thick plantations of cocoa-nuts and fruit trees that lined the shore spoke of the fertility of the soil. The praus that lay becalmed around us had their sails of the most glowing colours, in stripes of red, and blue, and orange, and seen under the light of an afternoon's sun, with their details softened by the haze, the effect was quite as Venetian as Venice, where, alas! those beauty-spots of the landscape are now no longer common, except upon an artist's canvas."

Meimbun is situated on a little river of the same name, at the mouth of which a cluster of huts, built on seaweed-covered piles, form each a separate island. The floors are within three feet of the level of the water, so storms cannot be frequent in this region. Squatting on the platforms in front of these houses, the adult natives spend most of their time, while the children, innocent even of fig-leaves, take headers into the water, engage in swimming matches and paddling-races in miniature canoes.

The river itself is singularly clear and pure, and close to its banks lies the market-place, "a picturesque jumble of ponies, ripe bananas, red sarongs, palm-leaf stalls, and flashing spears. Beyond, the sea-going praus are hauled up on shore, their unwieldy sterns a mass of quaint carving. Then through a tiny reach bordered by the Nipa palm, whose graceful fronds, thirty or forty feet in length, spring directly from the stream, and we find ourselves in a sort

of upper town, where the houses are built with seeming indifference either in or out of the water. The place is the absolute perfection of beauty and untidiness. Overhead the eye rests on a wealth of verdure—bamboo, banana, durian, jack-fruit, and the snowy betel-palm with its golden egg-like nuts. In these happy climes, man's needs grow at his very door. Cold and hunger, misery and want, are words without a meaning. Civilisation is far off indeed, and for the moment at least we have no desire for it."

Alas! what a contrast with our November fogs and February chills; our Irish peasants; our Scotch crofters; and our shivering skeletons in overcrowded towns! But what says Tennyson? "Better fifty years of Europe, than a cycle of Cathay!" Maybe, but all depends upon your personal standpoint, and at any rate the Sulu Archipelago is not a region towards which those who are in favour of a system of State-aided emigration for our surplus population need turn their gaze. The Malay's Paradise is usually the European's—well, the other place, if not his grave.

The houses of Meimbun are rickety enough constructions, but sufficient apparently for the climate. A little bridge spans the river, formed of a single palm-tree plank with a light bamboo handrail. Beyond the huts, the river-banks are closed in on both sides with a sort of picture-frame of tropical foliage, amid which cockatoos and golden orioles flit, while kingfishers skim the waters. The country is, in short, Paradisiacal; but it is haunted by a demon whose name is man. The "murderous Sulu" is not to be trusted, and to wander unarmed and alone away from the village is a dangerous experiment.

At Meimbun resides the Sultan of Sulu, a potentate in little else but name, keeping up a sort of barbaric splendour in this remote corner of the world. His "palace" is not much to look at—a long, low building with latticed windows, separated from the river by a short stretch of turf.

At the door guard is kept by two Sikhs; although, how they came into this gallery who can tell? All sorts of people seem to find their way to the islands of these Eastern Seas. Within the court are a couple of splendid carriages presented by the Spaniards to the late Sultan—useless gifts, seeing that there are no roads in the island, and the carriages are slowly rotting away like the power of the Sulu Sultan himself. The Hall of Audience is a large

apartment, rudely floored, hung with coloured cloths, and ornamented with a large Turkish lamp, an old four-post bedstead, and an enormous divan, fourteen feet square, covered with carpet, and with seats round three sides.

The late Sultan* was a young man about twenty, with a nervous but not unpleasing face, and with a title long enough to serve a dynasty. It is Paduka Baginda yang di per Tuan Maulana Sultan Mohammed Budde-rooddin. There can be no doubt about it, for he had it imprinted on visiting cards—also presented by the Spaniards. He was very much married, and his authority was limited to his harem—if, indeed, it reigned even there. He seems, however, to have had no wishes beyond his domestic circle and opium-pipe. He had six wives, which may account for his lack of ambition.

He received, and presumably his successor will also receive, from the British North Borneo Company an annuity of five thousand dollars in acknowledgement of their occupation of Sandahan on the island of Borneo, a large tract of which was under the sway of his ancestors, and he collected what tribute he could from native chiefs. These last do not seem to have minded him much, but to be concerned only with their own internecine quarrels. The island of Sulu is only some thirty-three miles long by twelve in breadth—less than the Isle of Wight—but it is a land of perpetual feud, and streams from end to end with Sulu blood, shed by Sulu hands. The eastern end is governed by the Maharajah of Loc, and the western end by the Maharajah or Panglima Dammang. These and the other chiefs are always more or less at war with each other, but at one in their hatred of the Spaniards. Human life counts for little among them, and therefore of peaceful industry there is none. It is a land of Ishmaelites.

Near Meimbin is Buat Tulipan, an extinct volcanic cone some two thousand feet high, cultivated in patches almost to the summit. Such diversity of scenery as Sulu affords is seldom seen in a tropical island. The jungle has been for the most part cleared away, but long dark patches of it still exist in the small gullies which cover the sides of the mountains. Nearly everywhere the eye is greeted with what an auctioneer would describe as an "extensive and park-like view." If we stand on one of the many

hills which tend to make the island look far larger than it is, we see before us a stretch of hill and dale covered with bright green grass, and dotted with little spinneys, or solitary well-grown trees; just such a view, indeed, as one might get from a country house in England, were it not for the suspiciously-sharp cone of some volcano cropping up on the horizon. Here and there, and where the soil has been freshly turned up by the rude wooden ploughs employed by the natives, it seems as if some large, ruddy-coloured blanket had been spread out in the sun to dry. Few huts are to be seen. Most of them are buried in little groves of coconuts, or around the dark foliage of the durian or Artocarpus, and the warm blue breathings of the hidden heath alone reveal their presence. In these open glades there is but little bird life, but in the other localities there is little difficulty in obtaining specimens. Perhaps commonest, or at least, the most conspicuous, is the scarlet-vested cockatoo (*Cacatua hæmatropygia*), which possesses a single rose-coloured feather for its crest. This species is occasionally tamed by the Sulus, and apparently can be taught to talk, although not readily.

South of Buat Tulipan lives a young Rajah, in a picturesque little village built half-in half-out of a creek running up from the sea. Here the natives catch fish, smoke them, dry them in the sun, and store them away in neat bamboo frames for future use. At the back of the village is a little cemetery. "The carved wooden headstones were closely packed together, some flat, and in the shape of a conventional leaf, others straight, and post-like, carved to represent a series of superimposed cubes. Overhead the 'Michelia'—the dead man's flower, as the Sulus call it—dropped its deliciously-scented blossoms, and the graves were strewn with the flowers of the Areca palm. Buddhist and Mahomedan alike plant the Champac above their dead. Day after day throughout the year the tree blossoms. Day after day the delicately-creamy corollas fall, entire, upon the grave, retaining both their freshness and their fragrance, unlike any other flower. Here Nature, kindly-hearted and unforgetful, year after year lays her daily offering of Champac blossoms upon each tomb."

Ten or fifteen miles to the westward of Meimbin is Parang, where dwells the Panglima Dammang before mentioned. It

* He has died since Dr. Guillemard's visit.

is a village of some thirty or forty houses, built on piles in the sea, each house being connected with the shore by a separate bridge of palm-stems. The style of building is like that prevalent in New Guinea; but the houses are different—those of Sulu being mere huts, with high-pitched gables, and with walls of roughly-constructed mats of palm-leaves. The people of Parang have rather a bad name, even for Sulu; and the Panglima himself is not a person to trifle with. When Dr. Guillemard visited him, he had just returned from a vicious battle with some Maharajah; and he carried his favourite "parang" (native weapon), with which he is credited with having killed thirty men. This potentate appreciates champagne, and consumed two tumblersful with much gusto.

The country round Parang is not quite so beautiful as in the neighbourhood of Meimbun, but is beautiful all the same, and it has attractions for sportsmen, since pig-hunting is a favourite chase there. The wild pigs are so numerous, that deep ditches have to be dug round the tombs to preserve them from the unclean animals.

Turn we now from these abodes of savagery and of Nature in her primitive loveliness, to the Spanish settlement on the island. Jolo, as it is called, is not more than about fifteen miles by sea, and less by land, from Parang; but what a contrast! In olden days Jolo was the capital of the island and the residence of the Sultan, and when Belcher was there in the "Samarang," it was a town built upon piles running out in three lines into the sea, the piles of the outermost houses being in twenty-four feet of water, so that Her Majesty's ship "Samarang" was moored at the entrance of the main street. Then it was known as Soog, and, in varieties of the spelling, such as Sugh, and Soung, and Soong, it appears in many maps and in many gazetteers to this day. Sometimes, also, it is designated on charts as Sulu, while the natives call it Tiangi—"the market-place." Jolo is the name given to it by the Spaniards, and as Spanish Town it is known in Borneo, so that really it is a place of many titles. Spanish Town it is to all intents and purposes, for scarcely any traces remain of the old native town described by Belcher. This last was destroyed by the Spaniards when they began, in 1878, to form a fortified settlement here. It remains more of a fortification than a settlement—a place of durance rather than a place of residence.

Regarded from the sea, it has a picturesque appearance, with the white houses and grassy spaces of the town clustered about the slopes of *Buat Timantangis*. There is no harbour, but good anchorage in deep water near the shore, protected on the north by a chain of little islands. There is a short wooden pier, with a lighthouse on the end of it, where a landing is easily effected. The town is surrounded by a loopholed wall, about twenty feet in height, behind which sentries pace to and fro incessantly. On the seaward side, however, there is no wall, but a gunboat is always stationed at the anchorage, and the shores are patrolled by soldiers. The gates are shut at sundown, after which no one is allowed to enter.

This description sounds very like that of a prison, and, in point of fact, Jolo is a prison, where are maintained a large number of convicts sent from Manila and other stations in the Philippines, kept in order by six companies of a Manila native regiment, officered by a Spanish Colonel and some five-and-twenty officers. The Colonel is the Governor of the place, and some of the officers have their families with them. The streets are pretty and well kept, with rows of bananas and cotton trees on each side, and there is a covered market-place or shed, in which the Manila people gather for gossip and cock-fighting—their chief amusement. Besides that, there is a capital regimental band, which discourses on the Plaza every evening, and, *voilà tout!* no one dare leave the town on the land side without a strong escort, unless he desires to form a billet for the spear of a Sulu.

"Here, listening to the band in the evening," says Dr. Guillemard, "sitting in the little creeper-covered arbour in the public gardens, with our excellent friend the Governor, pouring out a string of amusing absurdities between the pieces, we could shut our eyes and fancy ourselves in Nice, or some other like haunt of fashion in far-away Europe. If we opened them, the illusion vanished quickly enough. At the end of the street the sentry paced up and down behind the loopholed walls, and between selections from the 'Nozze' and 'Robert le Diable,' the sergeant of the guard placed the heavy key of the gate in the Governor's hand."

It is doubtful, indeed, if any place in the world can present such curious anomalies as Sulu; with a barbaric court at the south end, held by a Sultan without any

real authority, and a Spanish prison at the other end, outside of which no Spaniard dare show his nose, but within which are cafés, billiard-tables, a band that would not discredit London, fever, dysentery, and prevailing "ennui"!

Midway between the two extremes, lives a German ex-sea-captain, Schück by name, among plantations of cacao, and coffee, and hemp, where he thrives with his family and at peace with the ferocious Sulus, whose respect he gained at the expense of a series of stubborn fights. The rest of the island is divided among some half-dozen petty chiefs, little more than savages, but wholly despots, who are always at war with each other.

The island throughout is as healthy as any within the tropics; but in Jolo the mortality is high from dysentery and fever, to which, no doubt, the isolated and monotonous life lends ready victims.

Readily as the Spaniards assimilated the Philippine islanders, they seem unable to make any progress with those of Sulu; and they appear to be no step further forward than when they assumed the nominal sovereignty in 1878. Not many years ago the natives laid siege to Jolo, and tried to carry it by assault; they failed, but not before killing a number of the garrison. Then, still more recently, a Loc man managed to get inside the walls armed with his "parang," and making his way to the Plaza, commenced to cut down men, women, and children indiscriminately. It is said that before he could be overpowered and despatched he had slain no fewer than seventeen persons. Thus, then, there are excitements at Jolo, if not many pleasures.

From what has been said, it will be seen that the Sulu people are almost amphibious. They are also capital boatmen, and they use two kinds of boats. The dapang is a dug-out canoe, with a free-board heightened by planks, but differing from the usual Malay model in having both bow and stern cigar-shaped, the tops of the ends being bent upwards. These dapangs have large bamboo outriggers on both sides and can stand heavy weather. The praus, or larger vessels, are strongly built; not very neatly, perhaps, but with a good deal of ornamental carving on the sterns. They range from ten to twenty tons burden, and are used for voyages to Borneo and the more distant islands. Mention having been made of carving, it may be added that the Sulus

are very clever and tasteful at this sort of work, which is to be found about their houses and tombstones, as well as on their boats. Pearl-fishing is followed here, as elsewhere in the Malay Archipelago, and the Sulus are said to be the best divers in the world. They think nothing of a depth of seventeen or eighteen fathoms, and will swim straight down to the bottom without any weights to help them. One celebrated pearl-diver is said to have gone down in this way to a depth of no less than twenty-seven fathoms!

The language of the Sulus is allied to the Bisayan language of the Philippine Islands, but it abounds also with Japanese and Malay words, which probably came to the group along with Mohammedanism. Malay, however, is mostly spoken by the coast-dwellers. What writing there is—which is very little—is in Arabic characters.

The only efforts at systematic cultivation were, until lately, those of the enterprising German already mentioned—Captain Schück. As a trader in the Malay Archipelago—often shipwrecked and often captured by pirates—fate once cast him upon Sulu, when the natives were fighting the Spaniards. He espoused the cause of the Sulus, but the Spaniards managed to secure his vessel and to send him a prisoner to Manila. Upon representations to the German Governor, the latter interfered, and got the Captain released with one thousand pounds as solatium. Then he took his wife and family and settled for good in Sulu, where he is admired for his courage, and respected for his strict justice. His plantations are about the centre of the island, and he exports Manila hemp, cacao, and tapioca. Coffee has been tried, but has not been a great success.

Within the last two or three years, however, we understand that experiments have been made towards a new industry in Sulu. The German-Borneo Company sent over a little expedition, which seems to have been struck with the capability of the island for tobacco-growing. They began at once, and the first crop produced two hundred piculs—one picul equals one hundred and thirty-three pounds and one-eighth—valued at ten pounds per picul. The second crop was estimated to run to one hundred thousand pounds; and Chinese labourers from Singapore had been imported to gather and cure it.

The following note on the method of cultivation pursued may interest our readers. In December the felling of the

forest and clearing of the land commences. In April the nurseries are got ready, and the seed, mixed with ashes, is sown on raised beds. The young plants grow rapidly, and early in May—the beginning of the rainy season—they are pricked out in fields of three hundred by twenty yards, each of which is in charge of a coolie. The soil is then banked up round the stalks of the plants, and the leaves are searched for insects. Early in August the tobacco is ready for cutting. This is done an inch or two below the first leaf, and the plants are then hung up heads downwards in the drying-sheds, until the stalks become dry. Then the leaves are cut, packed in bundles, and sent to the fermenting-sheds. Here they are formed into pyramidal heaps, in which white fermentation takes place; the heat is carefully noted by thermometers. When the desired temperature is reached, the pyramids are rebuilt, the outer bundles being placed in the centre. As soon as the leaves are considered ready, they are taken to another shed, where they are sorted, pressed, and made into bales for shipment. The stalks left after the first cutting grow again, and yield two more crops, smaller in quantity, but not deteriorating in quality.

Now, it is worth noting that at Deli, in Sumatra, are grown the wrappers, or outside leaves, for the better qualities of Havana cigars. There are few soils capable of producing them; but it is asserted that the soil of Sulu is even superior to the best soil of Sumatra for the purpose. Thus, then, there may be a prosperous future in store for this anomalous and sanguinary spot in the Eastern Seas.

About five-and-twenty miles to the south-south-west of Sulu lie the islands of Siassi and Lapac, with Tapul and Lugus between them and the first-named. On Siassi a Spanish settlement was formed in 1882, consisting of small barracks for troops, two or three houses for officials, and a dozen or so of native huts. It has a Commandante all to itself. In 1882, however, Siassi had an epidemic of cholera, which carried off about five hundred of the five thousand inhabitants, and spread over to the adjacent island of Lapac. It is remarkable that in the Malay Archipelago Europeans are rarely attacked by this disease, which plays such havoc among the natives. Both Lapac and Siassi are volcanic, but have little forest, and in some parts are very bare, not nearly so attractive as Sulu.

Between thirty and forty miles to the south-west of these is the curiously-shaped island of Tawi-tawi, the second largest of the group. It is almost within hail of Borneo, the southern end of it being only thirty miles or so from the coast of the island. Here another Spanish settlement was founded early in 1883, and is named Tataan, being the first attempt of the Spaniards to gain a footing on Tawi-tawi, the natives of which have a shocking bad name, even for Sulus. Dr. Guillemard, who was at Tataan in the middle of 1883, says it is not at all a "taking" place, and there did not seem any imaginable occupation for the garrison of eighty coloured soldiers, seeing that the jungle closes in the barracks on all sides at a distance of only a hundred and fifty yards. This jungle is a capital cover for the natives to stalk the poor soldiers, which they do on every opportunity, and occasionally bag one or two. Tawi-tawi has been the chosen haunt of pirates from time immemorial, and even to-day the waters surrounding it are dangerous for small sailing vessels weakly manned and unarmed. The strongholds of these ruffians are along the mangrove shores of the south part of the island, which being guarded by a network of reefs and shoals, cannot be approached by any gunboat. This south end otherwise appears to be as beautiful as Sulu, and to have a very fertile soil. Indeed, Tawi-tawi altogether has great natural attractions, and several good harbours, so that it is to be hoped that Spain will manage soon to bring it within the pale of civilisation and active commerce. Unfortunately modern Spain is not a very apt instrument for either purpose.

Although so close to Borneo, the fauna and flora of Tawi-tawi are quite distinct from that island. Borneo, like Java, is Indo-Malayan in its zoological characteristics; while the Sulu Islands, like the Philippines, are Austro-Malayan in general; but with some marked peculiarities of their own.

Politically, also, the Sulu group is more allied to the Philippines. Its history has been one of perpetual civil war, and of long-sustained resistance to the Spaniards, who, ever since they gained ascendancy in the Philippines, have had hankerings after the Sulu group. For three centuries that struggle has been going on, and it can hardly be said to be ended yet. In the seventeenth century the Spaniards sent

repeated expeditions to Sulu, but without any result; until, in 1646, they arranged a treaty under which they agreed to leave the large island and betake themselves to Tapul, Siassi, and Pangutarang—the latter being the most northern of the group of any size. In the next century, however, the contest was renewed; for, in 1731, a fleet of thirty Spanish war vessels attacked the place then known as Sugh, now as Jolo. The Sulus actually drove away this fleet after capturing the colours. It was many years later before the Spaniards succeeded in gaining a footing on the island and establishing a garrison.

Down to 1871 little more was done; but in that year a renewed effort was made to obtain possession of the main island, and fourteen gunboats were sent to bombard and destroy the native town on whose site Jolo now stands. Then Jolo was built and the Spanish flag hoisted in 1876. In March, 1885, was concluded the now famous treaty between England, Germany, and Spain, whereby the sovereignty of the latter country is admitted over all the Archipelago islands between Mindanao—the most southern of the Philippine group—and the coast of Borneo. Under this treaty Spain renounces all claim to North Borneo and the island within three miles of its coast, in favour of England. The treaty also established freedom of commerce and navigation in the Sulu Archipelago, and stipulates that no export or import duties are to be levied either there or within the territories included in the charter of the British North Borneo Company.

What this commerce may eventually be worth, one can hardly say; but the potentialities are not inconsiderable were the natives weaned from their passion for bloodshed. We have not dwelt on the fauna and flora of these islands—this not being within the scope of our article; but, to all interested in such matters, we can commend the pages of Dr. Guillemard's interesting book.

JASMINE.

THEY bloom again, the fair white flowers,
They wreath the old familiar bowers
Just as they did a year ago:
I touch, but do not pluck, a spray,
How fresh it is! how bright and gay
Its tints of green and snow!

I touch, but do not pluck, ah no!
I gathered, just a year ago,
The last white cluster I shall pull
In all my life from these green boughs
That clothe the dear old rugged house,
And make it beautiful.

I plucked it, I, who used to stand
And watch a well-beloved hand
Pick the first jasmine flower for me
So many summers—but last year
The jasmine bloomed and faded, dear,
Unseen, untouched by thee.

But I, sore weeping in the day
Of desolation, found a spray
That lingered late, and bloomed alone,
I laid it, for the past's dear sake,
The last sad offering love could make,
In thy cold hand, my own.

Oh! is there knowledge where thou art?
Or doth the dim, dread river part
Thee verily from me and mine?
The glad sun shines, the jasmine blooms,
But sorrow all my soul consumes,
Love hungers for a sign.

For one fond look from thee to me,
One pleading word from me to thee,
One, only one, it would suffice,
To feel I kept my olden part
In those new musings of thine heart
At rest in Paradise.

Oh! silence empty of a sign,
Oh! gulf between my life and thine,
Firm fixed till I, myself, shall cross
The tideless waves, and find the shore
By angels guarded evermore—
Till death retrieve life's loss.

Oh! shall I know thee, dear, above,
In God's undreamed-of land of love?
Faith's whisper through the silence breathes:
"One waits thee in those blessed bowers,
And from the wealth of Eden flowers,
Thy fadeless garland wreathes!"

THE ROSE-WEAVERS.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I. THE MEETING.

It was the time of roses; roses in our homely England; roses in classic Italy; roses in lands ice-bound throughout half the year; roses everywhere!

This brief season the rose has made her own, is especially rapturous to inhabitants of the cold North, condemned, like the twin gods of old, to spend half their lives in the upper heaven, and the other half in Pluto's dark and dread domain. Certainly they enjoy a foretaste alike of those islands of the blest, destined for the heroic and the virtuous, and of that gloomy under-world, wherein the wicked expiate their crimes. And magical the transition in both cases from one to another! But yesterday winter covered the world with its icy mantle, and all Nature seemed dead. To-day, quiet rivers flow through pastures emerald green; on the glittering blue sea are seen a hundred sails; all the country folks are busy in the hay-fields; whilst roses have burst into bloom everywhere, making the air heavy with perfume.

In the royal garden of a northern island, maidens were busily weaving roses one midsummer day. They sat scattered in groups about the place, and made a pretty picture, some on the green sward beside the miniature lake, others occupying steps of the marble terrace; others again had chosen shady nooks and corners, where, bare-headed, they sedulously plied their task. Here and there stood baskets filled with cut roses, and as soon as one was empty, it was immediately replaced by the assistant gardeners. These roses, be it remarked, had just come carefully packed from the neighbouring Continent; not a single flower could be spared from the King's gardens just now.

Right merrily the girls went on with their bewitching work. They sang, they laughed, they chatted as unconcernedly as if the whole place belonged to them, which indeed it did for that day. Save for upholsterers and decorators, the charming little summer Palace was deserted. The director of the forthcoming ceremonies was good-nature itself, and well pleased to see folks gay, so long as they put their shoulders to the wheel.

In order that to-morrow's fête should prove a success, it was necessary that all under his direction should do this with a vengeance. Girls naturally look their prettiest when thus occupied. Weaving roses is a fairy task, and in light summer dresses, with their fair hair shining in the sun, their cheeks aglow with pleasure, these northern maidens might well challenge criticism. Most of them were daughters of the hardy fishermen of the island, descendants of the sea-kings of old; but their very rusticity lent an added charm. Rich and poor, gentle and simple, to-day consorted together.

There was one girl whom any sudden intruder must at the first glance have singled out as the Queen. She was tall and fair, with all the grace of a Teutonic maiden, and much more besides. A certain air of distinction marked her, too, from the rest, and although gay and animated as any, her face betokened intellect and character quite out of the ordinary way. It was evident that whilst throwing heart and soul into her work, her playful moods alternated with deep seriousness. As zealous a rose-weaver as any, she yet seemed absent from time to time; her thoughts were evidently elsewhere.

Her companion was one of those naïve, artless, seventeen-year-old maidens, fresh

from school, and as far as earnestness and insight are concerned, she might have been fresh from the cradle. In making garlands, as in more weighty undertakings, there must be a head to direct, and the younger and less capable girls had been thus told off to help their elders. The stately Ermengarde was clever enough and resolute enough to have directed far more important affairs than a Court ceremonial. Bertha, by her side, was a giggling little thing, with only will enough to do the simplest thing she was bidden.

A few minutes before, she had giggled when the head gardener came up to chat for two minutes with Ermengarde; she now began to titter afresh as she saw some one else approaching, this time a stranger. There was a constant going to and fro of functionaries, most of whom found time to interchange a word or two with Ermengarde, the brilliant, beautiful daughter of the head forester.

The intruder this time was a stranger, and naturally addressed himself to the most striking girl he caught sight of, as he descended the marble steps leading to the garden.

He was a sunburnt, bearded, handsome fellow, who looked more like a soldier or sea-faring man than a civilian, much less an official of a fastidious little Court. His dress, too, had a careless, rustic look, and his hands showed signs of exposure to all weathers. There was, however, a certain winningness, a bonhomie and candour about him, that made up for these drawbacks; a certain ease, too, betokening the educated gentleman.

"Pardon me, Fräulein," he said, dropping bare-headed into a seat beside the two girls. "Allow me to repose myself an instant. Here is my card: Adolf Christian Neumann, King's-Messenger. I have just ridden from the harbour on a special errand, and had at the same time a sly hint to see how things were getting on. I only hope this King of yours may prove worth all these roses!"

"Was any King that ever lived worth so much?" asked Ermengarde, with more of sorrow than scorn in her beautiful smile.

The young man smiled also, and looked at the speaker penetratingly and with deep and growing admiration. What a glorious creature! he was evidently thinking to himself. This tall, stately, golden-haired girl possessed natural, inborn dignity, and unlike these fisher-maidens, her companions, had seen more of the world than her own

little island. The head forester's daughter was, indeed, an accomplished and well-bred lady.

"You are no courtier, then?" he said, evidently provoked, yet fascinated by her outspokenness. "Your heart is evidently not in your work."

"Whose heart can ever be in such work as this?" she replied. "We flatter Kings, whilst all the time we either hate or despise them."

"This is a free country," the stranger put in. "Why not wear black to-morrow when your King comes, thus protesting in your own person against his iniquities?"

Ermengarde now laughed merrily. The incongruousness of the image thus suggested, appealed to her sense of humour. She wondered what all the loyal islanders would make of it—the head forester's daughter in black when every other maiden had put on white and rose garlands!

"I assure you," she answered, "nothing would please me better had I no one but myself to consider. But I am the head forester's daughter. In all social observances I am tied hand and foot."

"Tell me," the young man went on, settling himself comfortably in the rustic seat, evidently determined to talk as long as he could get her to listen to him; "what are these vilenesses, these desperate sins of your especial monarch, that make you long to cut off all Kings' heads?"

"Nay, history wants no more such martyrs," the girl said; "but since Kings have ceased to be lawgivers, what good purpose do they serve? And they get too much flattery. They live as completely shut out from the real life of the people as if they inhabited the planet Jupiter."

His mood changed from gay to grave.

"These roses, then, are a mere show of loyalty; the festive appearance this island puts on in honour of the Royal visit, means—nothing?"

"What should it mean?" Ermengarde cried again, with a scornful smile. "We are not living in the childhood of history. Even the rude fisher-folk now think for themselves. They know well enough that it is the laws that shield them from harm, not the favour of a King."

"But since these unfortunate beings, Kings, do exist," he went on, with returning sportiveness and good humour, "what would you have them do? How should they behave so as to deserve a real welcome from the people?"

"We are all God's people, Kings must first remember that," was the girl's spirited reply. "Then they should reflect that the honours heaped upon them are one and all unearned, and in most cases undeserved."

"On my word," retorted the other, "to judge from you, this little island must be a very hotbed of sedition."

"By no means. These islanders have enough to do to get bread for their children. They but bide their time. The world will be wiser one day," said the young lady with a toss of her head. Then, as if a sudden thought struck her, she turned round quickly: "One might suppose you were a King yourself, from the lazy way in which you sit looking on, whilst others toil and moil. Please help me to carry these garlands indoors."

The young King's-Messenger jumped from his seat flushed with pleasure, and right heartily laid his hand to the task. Each holding a handle of the basket, they ascended the marble steps, a superb pair to behold; he so winsome and manly, she so graceful and fair! They chatted gaily as they passed down a cool corridor, Ermengarde leading the way.

"Fräulein," he said shyly, when they had deposited their burden, "you seem to be in authority here. Could you order me something to eat and drink? Then I must mount horse and be off."

She conducted him to a small room near the kitchen set apart for the head forester's especial use, and opening a cupboard brought out such homely fare as the island afforded—rye-bread, cheese, whortleberry jam, and light beer.

"I offer you the best I have," she said coolly, "but if you had addressed yourself in the first instance to the house-steward, you would fare better."

"This is excellent; indeed, I desire nothing better," he replied, sitting down with capital appetite.

"When you have done, please close the door. I must go back to my task," added Ermengarde, but under one pretext and another he induced her to stay, making his meal as quickly as possible. Then he rose, hat in hand, prepared to take leave.

"I have one more favour to ask before I go," he said. "I return in the King's train to-morrow. You will honour me with your hand in the dance, will you not?"

"Certainly."

"Certainly, certainly," he exclaimed,

with petulant impatience. "There will be numerous claimants for the privilege. I must have something definite—a promise."

What trifling! her face said, but the thought was not put into words; so winning the stranger's manner, so sympathetic his voice, look, and speech, she could but humour him. And she was a woman after all. In spite of the thoughtfulness and nobility of her character, a character in which there was not a vestige of coquettishness, she recognised his adoring admiration, and the recognition brought joy.

CHAPTER II. THE SURPRISE.

THIS little island of the northern sea had been so far ill-used of fortune; hitherto it could boast of no Royal visit. King after King of the dynasty that sways these realms was crowned and buried; rumours of grand doings reached the fisher-folks from time to time; brilliant Court ceremonials, christenings, bridals, burials. A more stay-at-home folk than these islanders, except, perhaps, their neighbours, the Lapps, hardly existed. They heard of pageants without beholding any. Very rarely, and only on matters of urgent business, they crossed the sea that divided them from the Continent.

Now at last they were to have a pageant of their own; not, perhaps, to be compared to celebrations in the capital, but a great affair for all that. The King was coming!

The good islanders were not more exuberantly loyal than the rest of the workaday world. They were sorely weighed down with taxation. It was as much as they could do to get a frugal living. Sentiment had no hold upon this sturdy, matter-of-fact race. Yet that piece of news, the King was coming, sufficed to awaken universal enthusiasm. The island was about to keep holiday from end to end. From the remotest corners, all who were old enough to toddle and not too old to creep along with the aid of a stick, were flocking to the spectacle.

Capital the island could not be said to possess, nor was the so-called Royal Palace much more than a hunting-lodge or summer pavilion. There was therefore no possibility of carrying out anything to be called a programme indoors, and, as the weather was magnificent, alike the banquet and the ball were to take place in the open air. This arrangement admirably suited the general taste and convenience,

for whilst the little Palace could hardly have held a hundred and fifty guests, the entire population of the island would find more than breathing-room in the park outside. A fine stretch of sward was enclosed for the dancers, and a tent erected for the Royal banquet. Beyond these precincts, all could disport themselves as they pleased. Rows of booths, such as we see at fairs, were to be supplied with refreshments, served to all at the Royal expense. Truth to tell, this visit was a kind of apology on the part of a newly-crowned King for a series of ancestral neglects. The times, too, were critical. It was not a moment when rulers, whether of small States or large, could afford to have sulky subjects.

There were many reasons why Ermengarde, the head forester's daughter, should take a leading part in the day's proceedings. She was the best educated girl of the island, to begin with. She had seen something of life and manners in the great world beyond sea. She would know exactly what to do and say when leading her rose-garlanded maidens to welcome the King. A procession of girls dressed in white and bearing flowers was to await the Royal visitor on the landing-place, and it was Ermengarde's duty to offer a bouquet and make a little speech.

"What a mockery, what mere child's play, it all is!" she said, as she glanced at her white dress and wreath before putting them on. "If some hero were to be welcomed to-day, one who had risked his life for his country, or even saved the lives of half-a-dozen of his fellows, as many of our poor fishermen have done, then no one would prepare for this festival more enthusiastically than myself. But this King! He may wish to do good. He may be free from the vices of his fore-runners. What is he as yet, but a mere name to us?"

She twice adjusted the wreath of crimson roses to her fair head, and twice removed it.

"And no one is bold enough to tell them the truth. Kings live and die without hearing the truth. Could I speak to this one as I did to his messenger yesterday, open my heart to him, speak out as one rational, thinking being is bound to speak out to another, then his visit might not be made in vain."

It must not be supposed that Ermengarde was a young lady imbued with revolutionary doctrines, or that she was wanting

in accurate notions of history. She did not wish to see her island handed over to conspirators against the existing order of things; much less was she of opinion that to do away with Royalty would be to bring about a social millennium. But, young as she was, she had witnessed the horrors of civil war; she realised the havoc made in family life by military conscription; she knew that this long-suffering race of islanders were bowed down by the weight of taxation; and could the most ardent Royalist, the most impartial student of history, aver that dynastic ambition and intrigue had nothing to do with such afflictions?

This little northern kingdom was far from being ideally governed. Even now a Royal yea and nay were far too puissant. However, the King was coming; he must be welcomed. So at last, and with some reluctance, Ermengarde put on her white dress and wreath of crimson roses. A smile rose to her lips as she thought of that genial, impetuous stranger; his manner, she hardly knew why, had pleased her greatly. He was so frank, so generous and manly, and evidently, like herself, had seen something of men and manners on the great Continent. That promised dance with him would be a relief to the stiff ceremonial of the evening.

"Ermengarde, Ermengarde!"

A dozen girlish voices now called her name, for it was time to go. No prettier sight could be imagined than these blonde maidens as they trooped along in their white muslin dresses—silk and satin were unknown on the island, and jewels almost equally so. Few wore other ornaments but roses in their hair and on their bosom. The leader was as simply dressed as any; her pre-eminence—and it was marked enough—consisted in that inborn grace, that stately yet spirited beauty that would have marked her out among a far more brilliant fellowship.

The girls had not taken their place on the terrace a minute too soon. Hardly were they drawn up in proper order when the distant huzzas of the crowd outside the Palace gates, the firing of a salute in the harbour, the clatter of hoofs, and the braying of trumpets announced the Royal cavalcade. There was a general titter and trembling amongst the girls; they craned their necks in order to obtain a first glimpse; they waved their handkerchiefs; they grew crimson and breathless with excitement. Only Ermengarde retained

self-possession. She had her bouquet and little speech in readiness; her curiosity to behold the face of a King was not inordinate, and, it must be added, she could not help wondering all the time if her acquaintance of yesterday was really there.

The event so eagerly longed for was come and gone in a moment. A group of horsemen wearing brilliant uniforms dashed up; one, a little in advance of the others, with a broad ribbon across his breast, was the first to dismount, receiving homage from all sides. Ermengarde's flowers and words of welcome were graciously acknowledged, a few courtesies exchanged, a final huzza raised by the crowd, then the glittering uniforms, the stars and decorations disappeared within the Palace walls.

"What a noble presence!" cried one girl.

"What an engaging smile!" said a second.

"How handsome!" exclaimed a third.

Only the disconcerted Ermengarde had no word at command. In the person of the King she had recognised her new friend of yesterday!

"THE SOULS BEGUILLED HER."

It would interest no one to hear what particular studies led my friend Balfour and me to quarter ourselves in a remote Bohemian village. Anyhow, there we were last year for a good many months. The time passed very pleasantly, and we found the Bohemian peasants a simple, deserving folk, hard-headed, but honest, and worthy of their national proverb, "What a Bohemian promises, he performs."

But I do not believe that there exists anywhere a people to be compared to these Bohemian peasants for superstition.

In our village the whole population was staunchly Catholic; and, in addition to the long creed of the Roman Church, piously convinced of a number of local beliefs. There was the protection of the Holy Virgin infallibly to be obtained in a small chapel of "Our Lady of the Valley;" a holy well on the edge of the forest; a "wonder-working" image of Saint Vaclav in the village church; a Christ at the cross roads, which had thrice within the memory of living persons come down from the cross and walked about in the village; and many other marvels—enough, I should have thought, to have satisfied the largest appetite for something to believe. But all

that the Church has provided for him, and all the pious additions to her creed that he has been able to discover for himself, constitute something entirely insufficient for the unbounded capacity of the Bohemian rustic to believe in everything that he cannot see.

Balfour and I were liberal with our tobacco-pouches, and listened with grave faces to everything that we were told; and so we were little by little initiated into a large number of these good people's convictions.

And with what seriousness they related their opinions! I shall never forget the face of an old man, who, having, on the tenth of October, just killed the most harmless of "cripple-backs" at a four-cross road, confided to me the interesting fact, that on the Nativity of our Lady all the snakes have to go underground, and may not come out of their holes again until the feast of Saint George. The rebellious snakes—for there are some—are compelled by an irresistible power to crawl to the four-cross roads, where they invariably get killed. And here was the dead snake to prove it.

It was shortly before Easter that we arrived. The very next Thursday all the girls in the village turned out before day-break to go to wash at a spring-head at sunrise. This was to ensure them health and beauty during the next twelve months. They were very few of them pretty, and by no means all exempt from sickness; but that shook their faith in their ablutions not the least in the world.

Then in Holy Week we had fine doings. On Maunday Thursday there was the baking of the Judas cake—a sort of loaf that is eaten with honey, and secures the eater from being bitten by snakes for one year. On Easter Eve the various householders carefully took home some ashes from the baking of these cakes. Such ashes preserve houses from fire and lightning. At midnight on Easter Eve the people ran out into their gardens, in their night-clothes, to bawl to the trees, "Bear fruit, O trees! If you do not bear fruit we shall cut you down." This was doubtless a serious warning for the trees, and we were assured had a most excellent effect.

So far as we were able to discover, similar rites and ceremonies were going on all the year round. One day there would be a great burning of old brooms as a precaution against witches; the next some sort of incantation to prevent the arrival

of a thunderstorm—which came nevertheless. And I say nothing about the observances that indispensably accompanied births, betrothals, marriages, deaths, burials, seed sowing, harvest, and every other event of human life.

But, after all, these are only the smaller articles of the Bohemian peasant's faith.

Our villagers were to a man firmly convinced that they lived perpetually surrounded not only by ghosts, and witches, and warlocks, and such-like commonplace beings—to say nothing of the devil and all his angels—but also by a host of supernatural creatures, exceedingly poetical in the opinion of our friend the Professor at Prague; but—if what we were told about them was true—about as desirable neighbours as wolves or Bengal tigers.

There were strange beings to whom the village girls were liable to take likings, and, in consequence, to be lured to lose themselves in the forest, or to drown themselves in the river. There were Vilas, supernaturally beautiful young ladies, who wore white gossamer robes, and haunted the rocks and the lonely places in the woods; charming young creatures, but not to be trusted. With these it was a common thing for the Bohemian yokels to fall in love, bewildered by the lustre of their glorious eyes. The yokel being once fairly enamoured, the Vila tortures his soul till his heart ceases to beat. Then he dies—as might be expected.

Then there were Rushalkas, who on midsummer nights danced in the light of the moon around the springs; and wood maidens, who wore long, green dresses, and crowns made of glow-worms, and rode about in the forest on the backs of the stags: all with no other object in life but to bring unwary Bohemians to evil ends.

It was all very poetical no doubt. But I think that the educated people, like our friend the Professor, had all the poetry to themselves, and the poor peasants nothing but fears. And I fancy that any one who will have the patience to read this very simple story will agree with me.

We lodged with the sexton. He was an old grey-headed man, bent with the toil of many years, who occupied a little house near the church, and, with the assistance of his wife, made us very comfortable. Their only daughter had been married some six months before our arrival, and still lived with her parents. She was a fairly handsome young woman for a peasant, with a merry smile and a soft,

clear voice. Balfour and I liked to talk to her. We wanted to learn as much "Czech" as we could, and it was much easier to catch the words in Julie's soft, even speech than in the gruff voices of the villagers. Her husband came and went very irregularly. He was a waterman; one of the many in that neighbourhood who found employment on the great rafts that were floated down the river from the pine forest. Frantisek—that was his name—was well off for a man of his station, and the match had been considered a very good one for Julie. In fact, Julie appeared to be in such luck that the fathers and mothers of the other village lasses shook their heads, and averred that old Tomash, the sexton, had been performing nefarious rites with the egg of a black hen.

But Julie's luck was not of long duration. At the end of September the poor girl was proudly expecting shortly to become a mother, when, one evening, one of Frantisek's mates came in with the news that an accident had happened to one of the rafts, and that Frantisek was drowned.

Julie gave just one shriek, such a shriek as I hope I may never hear again, and dropped senseless on the floor. The poor girl was confined in the course of the night, and the next day her baby died, and old Tomash went to dig its tiny grave in the corner of the churchyard, where, in accordance with the beautiful Catholic custom, all the little children's graves were made together.

The gossips at the village inn nodded their heads gravely. "So much for dealing with the shotek," I heard one say to another. That referred to their suspicions about the black hen's egg.

The evening after the funeral, Balfour, coming in to supper, said:

"What do you think these enlightened people are saying about Frantisek?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Why—the Vodnik took him."

"And who the deuce is the Vodnik?"

"The Vodnik, I am gravely informed," replied Balfour, "is a thing that lives in large ponds and in the deep pools of the river. He mostly makes his appearance in the form of a boy with tousled hair, wearing a green jacket. Sometimes, however, he disguises himself as a huntsman, at others he takes the shape of a beast, often that of a hare. He can be recognised by the water that always drips from his left breast. The consequence of having anything to do with the Vodnik—who has

some very fascinating ways—is drowning. The Vodnik keeps the souls he drowns in his palace under the water in little pots with lids. Happily it is possible to be proof against Vodniks by eating twice baked bread. Frantisek, it seems, neglected this very necessary precaution, and so now his soul is in a little pot at the bottom of the Valtava."

Poor Julie got on very badly. For many days she hung between life and death. I ought to have said that Balfour and I are medical men, and I think we saved her—though, as it turned out, we might just as well have left the local leech to kill her in his own way.

I soon discovered that she had no doubt that the Vodnik had Frantisek's soul. At the same time she was sure that the same soul had, for some of Frantisek's peccadilloes, gone to purgatory. And she was very anxious, poor child, to go to our Lady of the Valley to do something for him. At times she was light-headed, and there were occasions when I fancied that her reason had been affected by the shock she had passed through. But, really, when these good people once began talking about their superstitions, it was impossible to say whether they were in their senses or out of them.

One October evening, when I was sitting a little while with her, she surprised me by asking:

"Do you think, sir, that it really was my little baby that died?"

Unhappily, there could be no doubt about it.

"I don't know," said Julie, shaking her head.

She dropped her voice, and, crossing herself, went on:

"Have you never heard there are wild women in the woods, and they come and steal away the babies from young mothers and put changelings in their places? I think that perhaps it was the changeling baby that father buried, and my baby is alive in the woods. Are there no wild women in the woods in England?"

"None."

"And no Rushalkas, and no Vilas, and no Vodniks?"

"No."

"I should not care to live in England," remarked Julie.

That seemed to me rather illogical. Vilas and Vodniks, so far as I had been able to understand, were anything but blessings. But Julie could not see it.

The first of November came. I had been for a long walk in the afternoon, and as I returned to the village the day was closing. The last gleams of the setting sun tinged with deep hues what remained of the red gold leaves, and the mist came creeping out of the forest, and across the meadows, and along the winding course of the river. Already the lights began to glow in the cottage windows, and from the church tower the deep tones of the Angelus rang out, followed by the sharp high note of the "death-bell," tolling the remembrance of the souls of the faithful departed.

On the village green were a whole crew of little vagabonds amusing themselves with throwing stones at the chestnut-trees, in the midst of which stood the crucifix—"the martyrdom of God," as the Bohemians name it. Informed of the time by the bell, the mothers began to appear at their cottage doors, calling to "Cashpar," and "Marek," and "Jan" to come in, and assuring them that the Klekanice—a bony individual who comes in the evening to carry off children under his long grey cloak—would certainly have the last of them: a threat that ended in a general scamper home as I passed on.

My path lay across the churchyard. The belfry-door stood open, and as I drew nearer I could hear heavy steps descending the winding stair. Tomash rang the bells, and I waited for him to come out. He closed the door, and slowly locked it with the big key that grated in the rusty wards, and then came to me. The old man looked anxious and full of care. He was very unhappy about his daughter.

"How is Julie to-night, Tomash?" I asked.

"She has been light-headed all day, sir," said the old man. "I am afraid for her to-night."

And he looked at his little grandchild's grave.

So far as I could gather, Julie had had some sort of relapse. Evidently her father entertained some special fears for the coming night, though what or why I could not make out. We walked a good part of the short distance in silence. When we reached the house I wished the old man "good-night," telling him to come to me if his daughter should seem really any worse.

Upstairs I found Balfour just come in.

"Where have you been?" I asked.

"Smoking a pipe with the priest. It is All Saints' Day it seems."

"Ah, the first of November, yes."

"And to-morrow is All Souls' Day—'Le Jour des Morts.' It appears that all the devilries that go on all the year round are nothing at all to what we may expect to-night. I have been hearing all about it. After midnight the forests will be full of ghosts. There will be people wandering about the streets in their shrouds; men burning with fire; and flittering lights, which are the souls of unbaptized infants. The people put lights in their windows for their dead friends to see, and fill the lamps with butter instead of oil for the souls that escape from the flames to grease their burns. The souls come up out of the graves when the church clock strikes midnight, and do not return to purgatory until cock-crow to-morrow. First of all they stay for a little while in the churchyard, dancing with delight at having escaped from their pains. This is the real 'Danse Macabre.' Then they go round and visit their friends. Finally, they all meet again in the church, and wait there till the cocks crow. Any one who goes out to-night and has the bad luck to meet one of them, or who ventures into the church before day-break, they will lure to his death, and so carry off with them."

"What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff,
That beetles o'er the base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason,
And draw you into madness,"

I quoted. "How much of all this does the priest himself believe?"

"More, I should say, than he cares to admit."

"I met old Tomash," I remarked, "and he said he was afraid of to-night for Julie. I see what he meant now. I hope they have not been scaring the poor girl with any of this rubbish."

We had our evening meal, and then sat reading awhile. About half-past ten Balfour looked up from his book.

"Listen!" he said. "Is that Julie?"

From below came faint sounds of smothered cries following one another.

And at the same time we heard the sexton's footsteps ascending the stairs.

"If you would be so good as to come down, sir," said the old man; "Julie is taken worse, I fear."

We rose to follow him.

"You have not been frightening her about the souls, Tomash?" asked Balfour.

"No, sir," answered the old man, evi-

dently a little surprised by the question. "We supped off cold milk, and we sprinkled plenty about the room."

"That is for the ghosts in case they come," remarked Balfour to me in English. "A nice way to reassure any one!"

Downstairs we found Julie sitting on the edge of her bed half dressed. She was in a wild, feverish state, with a scared expression on her face. By the hearth was a bowl of milk.

"Oh, father, father, I am afraid!" she cried, wringing her hands, "this is the night of the souls. Oh, sir," she begged, turning to me, "what is the time? Father and mother won't tell me. Is it nearly midnight, sir?"

"No, no, Julie; it is an hour and a half before midnight."

"Oh!" shrieked the poor girl, putting up her hands to the sides of her head, and rocking herself wildly. "Only an hour and a half, and then they will be coming. Father," she ran on, "have you brought in the spade, with which you dig the graves, away from the pick-axe? They will sound together at midnight if you don't. You know they will." Here the old folks began crossing themselves vigorously. "You have told me so yourself."

Tomash went out to fetch the spade, and we tried to get Julie to compose herself and to take a sleeping draught. But she perceived our intention and would take nothing. She was frightened out of her life; but she wanted to see her husband and her baby, and was afraid they would only come to her in her dreams.

"They'll come. I know they will. They do come and see the people they loved when they were alive, don't they, mother? And I know that Frantishek loved me. Only I am afraid! I am afraid!"

"If Frantishek comes, my child," said the old woman, "I have filled the lamp with fresh butter; and Frantishek will be thankful to us—he will be able to cool his burns, and he will not hurt us. Pray to the Mother of God, child, and say an 'Our Father' for the souls. Other people have seen them before now, and no harm came of it."

But the poor, light-headed girl only wailed on: "Oh, I am afraid, mother. I am afraid of the souls."

We remained with her till half-past eleven, trying alike in vain to coax her to take something, and to persuade her parents not to scare her out of her wits. I think we might have done something

if we could have got rid of the mother. As it was, Balfour said, at last, in English: "What is the good of our staying here? We are only making things worse." So we went upstairs again, promising to return presently.

In our own room we read again for a time, and then the church clock struck midnight. For some little while all had been still downstairs.

"Open the door," said Balfour, "and listen. I believe that that poor girl has fallen asleep, after all. She was tired out."

I opened the door and listened. Below, everything was still.

Then the sexton's old clock, a few minutes late, began to strike with a whirring of its rough machinery, and suddenly a wild shriek reached our ears.

"Oh! Father! For Heaven's sake, save me! Oh! Holy Mother of God! Father, father, I hear a rushing noise! The souls are coming. I can hear them dance. I hear the shrouds rustle. I hear their bones rattling. Father, the spade sounded: I heard it! Oh, my God! It is long till cock-crow. My lad and my baby are coming to me. Oh, Holy Mother of God, shield me! Father, I see eyes that gleam. There is a fiery man coming, father. It is not my Frantishek. He will steal my baby's soul. No, no; I see Frantishek. He wants me. He calls me. Oh, what shall I do? My baby is alive out in the woods, and I must go to him. I must, father! I must!"

And with the girl's wild shrieks mingled the sounds of some sort of scuffle, and then a door banged.

"By Jove! but she has bolted out of the house," exclaimed Balfour, starting up.

We ran down the stairs. In the open doorway stood the old couple, crossing themselves wildly, staring into the dark, and not daring to cross the threshold for fear of the souls.

"Which way is she gone?" I asked.

"Heaven knows, sir," answered old Tomash.

Balfour and I stepped out into the night. It was dark as pitch, and the fog hid everything more than two yards distant.

"Look here; this is no go; we can't find our way through this," said Balfour. "Only she cannot have gone very far."

"Who knows? She is raving mad," I answered.

We went as far as we dared, and then

reluctantly turned back. The next morning the poor girl's body was found in the mill-dam. And in the afternoon old Tomash was digging another grave.

Balfour and I attended the funeral. As I was coming away I overheard two old crones talking at the churchyard gate:

"Ah! death finds out the way, granny! Death finds out the way!" said one.

"Ay, ay, granny," answered the other, crossing herself. "The Mother of God be with us. The souls beguiled her."

RED TOWERS.

By ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "Gerald," "Alexia," etc., etc.

PART II.

CHAPTER XV. THE SURPRISE.

IN the dusk of a November afternoon, with fog up to the windows, Paul Romaine was sitting alone in his study at Red Towers. For the last two months his life had been curiously lonely and silent; he had helped Mrs. Percival to bring her charges home to England, Vincent having disappeared on the morning after the accident, and then had parted from them all in London without much good-bye, and come down to his own old home, where he shut himself up like a hermit. Though the woods were full of game, he could not be persuaded to take his gun out, or to ask his neighbours to shoot. He spent the daylight hours reading or playing, and towards dusk generally went out for a long walk with the dogs.

The place was really lonely now; for, soon after his return, the Cox family packed up their artistic tools and went back to London—Red Towers and its solitary squire had been, on the whole, something of a disappointment to them.

In those autumn days, Paul often found himself wandering through the old rooms as he used to do when he was a lad, though now they were peopled with a new set of visions, very unlikely ever to become realities. His thoughts were constantly occupied with Achille de Montmirail and their last walk together, and the strange, touching, affectionate wish that had been almost his last word. And from that—was it any wonder?—Paul's thoughts went on to occupy themselves with Antoinette, and he was conscious of a deep longing that she might belong to him, and that he might have the right to take care

of her and make her happy. One look from those sweet eyes, that he remembered, seemed to make it not impossible that she might some day give herself to him; and yet Paul was rather despairing. He thought himself a dull fellow; he was haunted by the difference of country and religion—her father had thought those things drawbacks.

"Is it possible," Paul asked himself, "that she could ever forget it all and be satisfied with me?"

As he paced the drawing-room and the library restlessly—in the midst of their strange medley of new art colours and old shabby furniture—he was entirely wrapped up in plans for Antoinette.

He knew that she was still at River Gate, where Mrs. Percival had taken her and Celia. It had seemed the best plan after the terrible shock to both of them. Paul would, perhaps, have been unable to keep away, if it had not been for Celia's presence there; he could not help shrinking from that. Not that he at all imagined that she would stay there all the winter; the affection between her and her aunt was hardly strong enough, though this great trouble of hers had seemed to draw them together. She was more likely to go back to France, where she had an assured position, and where her husband's many friends were certain to receive her kindly.

But Celia's doings and Antoinette's, present or future, were arranged in Paul's mind on no authority but his own. Nobody wrote to him; nobody told him anything.

Mrs. Percival had only written once since she went home, and that was two months ago. At last, however, on this foggy afternoon, her second letter had made its appearance, and as Paul read it for the second or third time, he felt as if a human friend had come to him in his solitude.

Mrs. Percival began with a great many apologies, which Paul skipped. Then she told him that Vincent was coming in a fortnight to say good-bye before going back to India. Also that Celia, "looking quite herself again," had lately gone to London, and from there on business to Paris, but was coming back to River Gate, she did not quite know when.

"I wish this poor child Antoinette could throw off her grief as Celia does," wrote Mrs. Percival, "and yet I don't. I had no notion a French girl's character

could be so deep, and her affection so strong. However, she is like her poor father, who certainly was different from other Frenchmen. I shall be sorry when the Lefroys come home, and I have to resign her to them. I suppose it will be soon. Could not you come for a few days while we are such a small party? I should like to see you, and so would the poor girl, I feel sure. Her eyes were quite bright yesterday when I mentioned your name, though one would have thought the association painful."

So the young squire of Red Towers sat over his study fire that afternoon, and made up his mind. Of course, time only could show whether his dreams could come true, and his wishes be realised; but he knew that a visit to River Gate now would be a step in this direction.

He had only to wait a few weeks, till Antoinette was gone away to her own relations, and then, in all probability, years or a lifetime might pass without his meeting her again. He was honest enough, and forced himself to think of the objections, of his own ignorance, of her father's words, that it was hard for a woman to live out of her own country. Could he make her happy? Would she be contented with what he could do for her?

In her own country she might marry a man of high rank, and have the friends and society that belonged to her own race. Would it kill the young foreign flower to be transplanted here?

Paul also told himself that he had not any real reason to think that she did more than like him in a very moderate way, or that she had understood the greatness of his admiration, and what it meant. She had always known of him as her father's friend, and most likely thought of him as much older than he was—a sort of uncle, in fact.

Paul could not help smiling at the fire when he reached this point, and then something came and swept all hesitations away. It said:

"Why do you torment yourself with holding back like this? You are alone in the world, and so is she; you have her father's last words to tell you that you are not presumptuous. Besides, you have thought of nobody else for weeks. You love Antoinette with your whole heart and strength. Her father told you that your life had not yet begun; it is beginning now. Twenty-eight is not exactly a great age, after all."

"I will go to River Gate to-morrow!" said Paul, in answer to these remarks.

He telegraphed to Mrs. Percival the next morning, and arrived at Woolsborough in the evening, just in time to dress for dinner, so that he came down to the drawing-room without having seen any one. The world was still wrapped in fog, at its densest here by the river, and Paul had had a damp, cold, unpleasant journey. It was with a feeling of great satisfaction, his new and happy hopes filling all his thoughts, that he opened the door of the delightful old room. With the blazing fire lighting up all its rich colouring and pretty things, it was quite as charming in winter as in summer; it had always been so; and the very sight of it, the touch of the door-handle, the slow moving of the tall, heavy door as he pushed it open, had a way of making Paul feel a boy again. There was only one lamp lighted, and that was near the door; but all the far end of the room was glowing in firelight, and somebody was sitting there, somebody in a long black dress, shadowed by a screen. For a moment Paul felt a little breathless; it must be Antoinette; then he quickly made himself remember that she could not and did not care for him; then he was struck by something strange in the attitude of this lady lying back by the fire. It was too grown-up, too luxurious for Antoinette, who had been brought up differently from an English girl, and still kept her childish habit of sitting upright on a "pouf" or a high chair.

But Paul walked forward into the room, and his doubts were set at rest immediately. The shadowy lady turned her head, with a glimmer of gold about it, held out her left hand in a lazy, regal sort of way, and said, "You here!" in the voice of Celia.

"I have just come. I did not expect to see you," said Paul, quietly. "I thought you were in London."

He was rather fanciful, and the associations of rooms and things were never without their influence on him. This old room—what recollections lived in it! He would have said it was impossible ever to meet Celia there again; at this moment he despised himself, almost forgetting all that had come between, for his new dreams of meeting somebody else. Here, at River Gate, Celia seemed still to have her old influence. It had been different in France; she was not the same woman there. Paul stood on the hearth-rug and looked at his watch, comparing it with Colonel Ward's

old French clock, which was on the chimney-piece. Celia looked at him, her eyes shining and very blue. Perhaps she read his thoughts, for she was clever enough to do what she chose in that way. Whatever her own thoughts may have been, there was a kind of suppressed excitement in her face as she sat there; a little flush was in her cheeks, and her pretty mouth was set in a determined fashion. Her black draperies suited her wonderfully, and Paul knew that she had never looked more lovely in her life.

"In London? No; I wish I was," she said. "I came down last night, unfortunately; but I am going back to-morrow morning."

He looked the question he could not ask; evidently something was wrong.

"Oh yes," she said, "I am a very dreadful person. You had much better not have come to-day; and Aunt Flo would have been nicer if she had put you off. For my own sake I don't care, though I suppose you have not seen any one yet, or heard anything?"

"No," said Paul. "I only got here at 7.20. I don't understand——"

"You soon will," she said. "They will tell you directly after dinner, which will be carried through with that ghastly, cowardly stiffness which belongs to Uncle Tom on occasions like this. He really is a walking example of the Pharisees. Aunt Flo will try to be polite, and choke down her tears. I shall be scornful, and poor Antoinette, being an ignorant child, will think English tempers and manners very funny things. You may be a bright spot, but I am afraid you won't, now that I have told you all this. You will be expecting the shock that is in store for you. And when you know—I suppose—you will be as bad as Uncle Tom himself."

"Why do you say that?" said Paul.

He stood gazing into the fire, for he did not dare to look at Celia. There was something in her voice that seemed to plead with him, to thrill his whole being, to bring back a thousand things better forgotten. How terribly possible it is, after all, to forgive everything to a creature one has once loved. Paul had two natures, like the rest of us. All that was best and strongest and manliest in him had freed itself long ago from Celia: the attraction that had drawn him to Antoinette was honest and real; some day it would govern him completely, with no fear of change. But now, here, in the old River Gate drawing-

room, haunted by Celia, it seemed as if she had only to stretch out her hand, to take her power again.

"Why do I say that?" she said. "Because you are hard, like the rest of the world. You can't make allowances. You like people to be unhappy if you think they ought. Not that I care," she went on with the strangest sob in her voice. "I might have reckoned on losing all my friends; and after all, you are not one of them."

Paul turned round quickly then, and looked at her.

"Yes, I am," he said boyishly. "I don't know what you are talking about; but I suppose the Canon has taken things by the wrong handle somehow. I will do anything in the world for you—only tell me yourself what all this bother is about."

"Oh, Paul, how nice you are!" murmured Celia, with a slight, sad laugh which ended in a sigh. The trouble she was in, whatever it might be—Paul could not guess or understand—was evidently something that moved the depths of her nature. He was reminded of old days, of times when she had said, half passionately, that she was not good enough for him; but especially of that hour in the *Hôtel des Deux Frères*, five years ago, when she had tried to win him back. She was in earnest then, and now.

"I have told my news once," she said, after a little pause, "and really, do you know, I don't feel inclined to do it again. I can see you mean to be kind—thank you—perhaps you won't be so hard upon me; but after all it is no business of yours. And you are rather conventional, and you will be awfully shocked and think me very heartless. That, of course, I am, as the world looks at things. Yes—you, of all people, will think I am made of stone. And yet I fancy somehow that you, of all people, will be the one to understand me."

Paul listened to these rather disjointed remarks, and at the end of them he smiled.

"I think you had better tell me all about it," he said.

"Certainly not," she said quickly, "if you have changed so utterly as to laugh at what I tell you. That is worse than Uncle Tom. My affairs have been no laughing matter, Paul, for some time past."

"Who knows that, if I don't!" he replied gently. "I smiled because I thought what you said was true—that I did understand you. I beg your pardon."

"I believe you are the honestest man in the world," she said, looking at him.

"At present I am the most curious."

"Don't be cynical," she said. Her colour deepened; she leaned back in her chair, her face shaded by a screen. "I will make my confessor," she said. "I don't wish to excuse myself—but I will just ask you to try and realise the sort of strain and loneliness that I have been suffering lately."

"Of course—it is only natural," Paul said very low, as she seemed to pause for an answer. He had forgotten, for the moment, in the absorbing interest of herself and her talk, that only two months had passed since her husband was brought home dead. The shadow of the tragedy fell upon him, for the moment, in an almost overwhelming way. "You, of all people, will think that I am made of stone!" Yes, Celia; but what was she driving at? What did she mean? She, watching him keenly, was quite aware of a touch of wonder and coldness in his manner, which had been so friendly just now. Her own voice was harder when she spoke again; the effort, to do her justice, was a really painful one.

"Paul," she said, "I am going to be married again. It may not surprise you very much—to Vincent." She paused, while he stood perfectly silent, staring into the fire. "There goes your friendship," she said lightly, with a laugh which was sadder to him than tears. "Well, you are just like the others, only rather worse, because they stormed. Can't you say something to me, Paul?"

"I can say nothing that you will listen to," he said, after a moment. "It is not me that you are hurting this time."

"I am hurting no one," she said, almost passionately. "No, no one. I cannot be expected to go back to France, to live among all those people who hate me in their hearts. Put yourself in my place, Paul: if anybody ever could, you can. Why should I be condemned to go on living a life like that, just out of respect to what people will say?"

"But you are not alone——"

"You mean Antoinette. She will be better without me. She has been very sweet to me always—but now—well, we don't and can't understand each other."

"She doesn't know?"

"Not yet, no. I can't tell her. I may write to her."

"Perhaps she need not know yet. It would be less painful as time goes on——"

"There is not much time to spare," said Celia. "You understand, don't you? He sails in three weeks, and I am going with him."

It was a moment or two before those words penetrated to Paul's brain, and then he gave no outward sign of sorrow or surprise. He only said, as if speaking to himself: "Is that really possible!" and then his strange talk with Celia was ended, for the door opened, and Mrs. Percival and Antoinette came in together.

Mrs. Percival did not look pretty or attractive; she was pale, and her eyes were red. Antoinette was pale, too, thinner and older than in summer days, but the clear delicacy of her young face, the dark beauty of her eyes, were more remarkable than ever; and she met Paul with a smile that had something of the old happiness in it. He both felt and looked serious enough, and at that moment, perhaps, Celia fell to her very lowest depths in his esteem. There was the width of the world, certainly, between a woman like her and a girl like this; and somehow, with a keen thrill of pain, Paul felt himself unworthy to touch the girl's hand.

Mrs. Percival looked curiously from him to Celia, and then began talking to him, rather absently, about his journey and the fog. Paul, answering her questions, was all the time watching Antoinette. She, quite unknowing of this, had moved forward to the chair in which her stepmother lay motionless, and now, as she stood there, her hand was on Celia's shoulder. After a moment Celia's hand stole up to meet it, held it, pressed it softly against her cheek in a little caress. The thing was all done in the shadow, quickly and silently; but Paul saw it without looking, and thought about it very much afterwards. Perhaps it was as well for Celia that one person did not yet know the worst of her; and yet this person, the most injured, the most insulted, surely ought to know.

Then came dinner, and Canon Percival, who received Paul with gracious dignity, and offered his arm to the Marquise de Montmirail with ceremony worthy of Louis the Fourteenth.

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